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INCH STREET PROTEST:

Locals crying out for reply

Story: KIRSTEN HOLMES

A group of concerned residents of Inch Street are still waiting for answers regarding the incident on January 7; when a military ordinance shell leaked its contents when being unloaded at Denis Cooke's Salvage Yard.

Complaints have been made to both the Lithgow Council and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), who are still working on their findings.

As this incident happened in a work environment Work Cover is handling the investigation on the actual site, and their investigation is still continuing.

The EPA was present when Work Cover instructed that the four shells in question were ordered from the site and returned to the army base at Marangaroo.

It turned out that the substance leaked was a form of benzene, which is a petrol-like substance.

This incident is the last in a stockpile of concerns that have been building to come to a head for Inch Street residents.

Although it was a relief that the ordinance did not contain mustard gas, benzene is still toxic.

Debra Smith is a cancer survivor with a battered immune system that barely works, and she lives over the road from the salvage yard.

Debra is very scared for her fragile health.

Shirley Hodge and Robyn De Costa have lived in Inch Street for 50 and 49 years each, and Francis Laurenson used to work for the EPA, so her concerns were of a more scientific and environmental nature.

"We did not that think that was enough.

Francis Laurenson makes the point that, "if it was worth that much money to evacuate and feed us all, why not test the soil immediately."

The core of all the issues is that the area has

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Residents want answers

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always been zoned as industrial, and now both residential and industry continue to grow and are at breaking point as they find it more and more difficult to co-exist in Inch Street.

Shirley Hodges took up a partition in the street about the problems the residents were experiencing with their industrial neighbours 12 to 18 months ago.

The partition was handed it to Councillor Howard Fisher “and we’ve have had zip.

“This Council letting us down,” Shirley said.

“This used to be a lovely street,” Robyn De Costa said.

Denis Cooke’s Salvage Yard has grown over the years from a backyard business that recycled vehicle batteries at the other end of town, to a salvage yard in Methven Street, where he outgrew his yard and moved again.

The salvage yard relocated to Inch Street and the business has continued to grow over the years.

Some of the residents now demand answers on the environmental state of the salvage yard and what else might be leaching out of the soil or into the creek at the back of the premises.

They want to know why Denis Cooke’s Salvage Yard is not a scheduled premise on the EPA’s list for regular five yearly inspections for toxicity and what the Council will do about their cries for a solution to their growing concerns.

The residents all agree that they can’t

stand the sight of the site and Denis has the unflattering title as the neighbour from hell.

Denis is a well-liked fellow around town so why then has he inherited such a title.

It does look like organised metallic chaos and here is even a yellow ‘junk yard’ dog tied up near near the weigh station.

There has always been an issue with the noise of the salvage yard.

Residents sayd the crusher is going most days, and, according to the residents even on Sundays, often starting at 6 am.

Thye say all local traffic has to take the back seat and give way to big B double trucks that go up and down the street at all hours of the day, and two semi trailers leave the yard each day with their crushed metallic load.

The trucks have trouble turning in the street, and the residents are subjected to the annoying noises that a reversing truck make.

“And then there it is — the back of a big truck right outside your front window.

“We can’t sit on our front verandahs — it’s wrecking our quality of life,” Shirely Hodges said.

According to neighbours of the yard, trucks are unloaded on the footpath at the front of the yard, making pedestrians walk around and onto the road.

Under section 91 of the Environment Assessment Act appropriate parking and access is required for all in the street and it is often hard to park because the trucks are there.

Under the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) legislation a person or business is liable for anything that leaches into a sensitive creek up to 100 metres of your property, but the salvage yard is not tested.

Another issue the residents have with the industries in Inch Street is that the owners of these businesses don’t live there, so they don’t have any concept of what it is like to be woken by big trucks.

According to his neighbours, Denis Cooke’s business has outgrown the street and Inch Street is not the area for him.

What was also disturbing was that before the residents had any answers as to what actually happened, the salvage yard was open for business as usual at 6 am on the Friday morning.

Apart from getting the facts from the EPA and the Council as soon as possible, the residents of Inch Street want an apology for the inconvenience and alarm inflicted upon them.

An elderly man recently purchased 182 Inch Street and had a builder in that fateful day.

He and the builder were evacuated like everyone else.

They left the house at 3 pm and returned later that evening.

The builder had to rehire the floor sander and edger and buy a new bucket of sealer, drive back from Sydney to finish work the next day and top up the car with petrol.